



Kwanzaa (Candleholder & Mat)

Kwanzaa is a 7 day festival celebrating the African American people, their culture and their history. It is a time of celebration, community gathering, and reflection. A time of endings and beginnings. Kwanzaa begins on December 26th, the day after Christmas, and continues until New Years Day, January 1st.

Each evening a family member, usually the youngest child, lights candles in a special candleholder (kinara) and discusses one of the seven principles of Kwanzaa. On the sixth day, which falls on New Years Eve, family and friends get together to enjoy a large feast and to celebrate their history, culture, and the upcoming new year.

The holiday of Kwanzaa was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966, during the period of US history in which African Americans were involved in struggles for their civil rights. This was the period of Martin Luther King, the Civil Rights movement, and Black Power.

Dr. Karenga wanted to create a holiday that would bring African Americans together in celebration of their black culture. He was inspired by the "first fruit" or harvest festivals that were celebrated throughout Africa.

The name Kwanzaa is a Kiswahili word for "the first fruits of the harvest". Kiswahili was chosen because it is a non-tribal African language which encompasses a large portion of the African continent. As an added benefit its pronunciation is rather easy. Vowels are pronounced as they would be in Spanish and consonants, with few exceptions, as they are in English. For example: A=ah as in father; E=a as in day; I=ee as in free; O=oo as in too. One last note, the accent or stress is almost always on the next to last syllable.

This holiday is observed from December 26th through January 1st. Again its focus is to pay tribute to the rich cultural roots of People of the African Diaspora. Though first inspired by African-Americans, many of African descent celebrate this occasion today. Its reach has grown to include all whose roots are in the Motherland. Its' concept is neither religious nor political, but is rooted strongly in a cultural awareness. This is not a substitute for Christmas; however, gifts may be exchanged with the principles of Nguzo Saba always in mind. Gifts are given to reinforce personal growth and achievement which benefits the collective community.

- Umoja (unity) U-MO-JA
- Kujicahgulia (self determination) KU-JI-CHA-GU-LIA
- Ujima (collective work and responsibility) U-JI-MA
- Ujamaa (cooperative economics) U-JA-MA
- Nia (purpose) NIA
- Kuumba (creativity) KU-UM-BA
- Imani (faith) I-MANI

Lighting The Kwanzaa Kinara

First Day of Kwanzaa - On the first day of Kwanzaa the black candle is lit, representing the first principle of Kwanzaa - Umoja (oo-MOH-jah): Unity.

Second Day of Kwanzaa - On the second day the black candle is again lit, as well as the farthest red candle on the left. This represents the 2nd principle of Kwanzaa - Kujichagulia (koo-jee-chah-goo-LEE-ah): Self-Determination.

Third Day of Kwanzaa - On the third day the black candle is lit, then the farthest left red, and then the farthest right green candle. This represents the 3rd principle of Kwanzaa - Ujima (oo-JEE-mah): Collective work and responsibility.

Fourth Day of Kwanzaa - On the fourth day the black candle is lit, then the farthest left red, and then the farthest right green. Then the next red candle on the left. This represents the 4th principle of Kwanzaa - Ujamaa (oo-jah-MAH): Collective economics.

Fifth Day of Kwanzaa - On the fifth day the black candle is lit, then the farthest left red, the farthest right green, the next red and then the next green candle. This represents the 5th principle of Kwanzaa - Nia (NEE-ah): Purpose.

Sixth Day of Kwanzaa - On the sixth day the black candle is lit, then the farthest left red, the farthest right green, the next red, the next green and then the final red candle. This represents the 6th principle of Kwanzaa - Kuumba (koo-OOM-bah): Creativity.

Seventh Day of Kwanzaa - On the seventh day the black candle is lit, then the farthest left red, the farthest right green, the next red candle, the next green, the final red and then the final green candle. This represents the 7th principle of Kwanzaa - Imani (ee-MAH-nee): Faith.

On the seventh and final day of Kwanzaa all candles in the Kinara are lit. When the night is done, the family takes one last drink from the Unity cup and the candles are extinguished. Kwanzaa is over till next year.

